



EDMUND BERGER 2018-03-09

## CUNNING WAR MACHINES

MASHINES, ABSOLUTE SPEED, ACCELERATION, BARBARISM, CAPITAL, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, FASCISM, MARXISM,  
NONPOLITICS POSFASCIST PEACE, SMOOTH CAPITAL, WAR MACHINE



A speculative proposition: Deleuze and Guattari's admonitions of caution in relation to absolute deterritorialization and destratification, as detailed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, is isomorphic to their historical analysis of the war machine's capture and subordination of the State and the global geopolitical fallout from this movement.

In the plateau titled "How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?", D&G offer their well-known stern warning against improper approaches to deterritorialization and destratification. Even if these movements are necessary for the production of the New and act as the dynamism of destructive, creative evolution itself, one must avoid "wildly destratifying". If the strata is "blown

apart” too quickly or too violently, one “will be killed, plunged into a black hole” (ATP 161).

This warning is tied directly to their analysis of fascism given in ATP. Whereas fascism in *Anti-Oedipus* was associated with the powers of reterritorialization that choked off the movement into absolute deterritorialization, the fascism of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*'s second volume is profoundly different: it is itself operating in a vector of deterritorialization, as a line of flight tending towards an absolute speed and infested with the “passion of abolition” (ATP 299). This line of flight is profoundly suicidal, and is rushing towards not a negentropic individuation, but into the entropic vortex of a “black hole”. Too wild of a destratification, that is, a destratification that has not been approached with caution, wisdom, and *cunning*, is a destratification that engenders the fascistic line of flight that can only culminate in some form of spectacular suicide.

Following Virilio, D&G pose the fascist state not as a totalitarian machine – which here takes the place of what had been defined in terms of fascism in AO – but a state reaching for suicidal speed. Death is given from the outset, and the desire for its immediacy becomes the fuel for its monstrous engine.

*Unlike the totalitarian State, which does its utmost to seal all possible lines of flight, fascism is construed on an intense line of flight, which it transforms into a line of pure abolition and destruction. It is curious that from the very beginning the Nazis announced to Germany what they were bringing: at once wedding bells and death, including their own death, and the death of the Germans. They thought they would perish but that their undertaking would be resumed, all across Europe, all over the world, throughout the solar system. And the people cheered, not because they did not understand, but because they wanted that death through the death of others. Like a will to wager everything you have every hand, to stake out your own death against the death of others, and measure everything in “deleometers”.* (ATP 230)

Across the book's last three plateaus – “The Treatise on the Nomadology”, “The Apparatus of Capture”, and “The Smooth and the Striated” – a fragmented depiction of an immense historical passage rises to the surface that is plugged directly into this argument. What is unveiled is nothing less than a Shoggothic insurgency, a complex and emergent rebellion of tools against their masters. It follows the intertwined paths of the war machine and capital as they unbinding themselves from previously firm restraints, ultimately to culminate in the instantiation of a *globalized smooth space*. For D&G, this situation indexes the superseding of fascist “total war” – that is, war swept up in the suicidal thrust into pure abolition – by a “terrifying” *post-fascist peace*. This peace does not in any way undermine the existence of war as such. Instead, it makes war a part of itself, and suspends the suicidal horizon. Hence the speculative proposition at the outset: is the passage from fascist abolition to terrifying peace an affair of moving from wild, destructive destratification to something more akin to cunning?

To get at this question, it's worth unpacking the architecture of this process. Broadly speaking, the trajectory of the war machine that D&G present unfolds as such:

- 1) The capture or appropriation of the war machine by the State.
- 2) The subordination of the war machine to the State's political aims and subsequent deployment.
- 3) The evolution of the form of war from limited to total war, triggering a growth in the war machine.
- 4) The eclipsing of the State by the war machine and its reduction to the position as internal component.
- 5) The reversal of war machine-State relations sets off the emergence of a global smooth space.

Clausewitz's famed aphorism that “war is the continuation of politics by other means” is an appraisal of the capture, subordination, and deployment of the war machine by the State. The war machine, overcoded, regimented, and numbered, loses its operational autonomy. Stripped clean and made into an internal component-arm of the State, its goals are the political aims of that State. An evolutionary slippage into higher and higher stages begins here, passing from the granting by the State of *war as the direct object* to the war machine, to limited war (that is, war characterized by restraint in both conflict itself and the degree of mobilization that upholds this conflict), and on to total war (war in which restraints in conflict and mobilization are repealed, Jünger's *Total Mobilization* fueling intense, seemingly unending conflict). Fascism blossoms in the leap from limited to total war, from ‘gentleman's war’ to suicidal conflict. As such fascism remains locked into the Clausewitzian doctrine, and appears perhaps the war-politic's relationship taken to its most extreme heights.

At this point everything changes:

*...when total war becomes the object of the appropriated war machine, then at this level in the set of all possible conditions, the object and the aim enter into new relations that can reach the point of contradiction... We could say that the appropriation has changed direction, or rather that States tend to unleash, reconstitute, an immense war machine of which they are no longer anything more than opposable or opposed parts. This worldwide war machine, which in a way “reissues” from the States, displays two successive figures: first, that of fascism, which makes war an unlimited movement with no aim other than itself; but fascism is only a rough sketch, and the second, postfascist, figure is that of a war machine that takes peace as its object directly, as the peace of Terror or Survival. Total war itself is surpassed, toward a form of peace more terrifying still. The war machine has taken charge of the aim, worldwide order, and the States are now no more than objects or means adapted to that machine.* (ATP 421)

Clausewitz reversed: the understanding war as the continuation of politics is junked by politics becoming the continuation of war. If total war is overcome at this point, it is not because it has become impossible. It is the threat of total war itself, at its most apocalyptic extreme, that makes possible the terrifying 'peace of survival'. The global smooth space is haunted by total war, and for this reason we could say that total mobilization still persists, as the fundamental prerequisite for this haunting. Indeed, as Jünger stresses the state of total mobilization, which channels "the extensively branched and densely veined power supply of modern life towards the great current of martial energy", is a mode of subjection that occurs "in war and peace" (Jünger, "Total Mobilization"). In the terrible peacetime of the ascendant war machine, total mobilization and the specter of total war revolve around the game of deterrence. Against fascist war, "the war machine finds its new object in the absolute peace of terror or deterrence". (ATP, 467)

None of can be regarded, however, as a purely autonomous process, and is entangled with large-scale tendencies in techno-economic development. The gradual autonomization of war, which stands at the horizon of the war machine's ascendancy, is inseparable from the gradual autonomization of capital itself. The shoggothic insurrection staged by the war machine is the same insurrection staged by capital: "constant capital (resources and equipment) and human variable capital" are the "very conditions that make the State or World war machine possible." (ATP 422)

D&G trace this entanglement back to long before the unleashing of the capitalist mode of production, right to the initial capture of the war machine by the State apparatus. The freely-moving war machine effects a smoothing of the territory, but once captured it became "perhaps the first thing to be striated" (ATP 490). Initially oriented towards self-organization and free activity, the 'work model' is imposed upon the war machine, a prototype for the diffuse organization of labor necessary to carry out the great public works of antiquity (an evolution that is drawn up in detail by Lewis Mumford in his two volumes of *The Myth of the Machine*).

The war machine's power is greatly accelerated in the age of capitalism. The era of limited war (roughly 1640 – 1740) was a period of great economic "concentration, accumulation, and investment", laying the groundwork not only for the explosive take-off of the Industrial Revolution, but provided the infrastructure would that would push limited war towards total war. "The factors that make State war total war are closely connected to capitalism: it has to do with the investment of constant capital in equipment, industry, and the war economy, and the investment of variable capital in the population... The fact that this double investment can be made only under prior conditions of limited war illustrates the irresistible character of the capitalist tendency to develop total war" (ATP 421). This is an exact description of why the war machine will ultimately emergent above and beyond the State: as Marx's formulas concerning the organic composition of capital show, the long-term tendency of capitalist development is one in which constant capital grows against variable, thus illustrating the radical elimination of the human from the processes of production. Insofar as the laboring body remains, undergoes a leveling process, losing more and more of its character as a tool-wielding agent and becoming a mere 'conscious linkage' between machinic components. Thus, in the movement from limited war to total war to the superseding of total war by postfascist peace, D&G have effectively applied Marx's economics directly to the evolutionary trajectory of the war economy that sustains and fuels the war machine.

Capital that is restrained by the State and attached to the highly regimented work model is *striated capital*. Capital that is becoming autonomous, which can only occur when automation has inevitability and sufficiently transformed the nature of the work model and cybernetic apparatuses have transformed the whole of society into a source of value extraction, is by contrast *smooth capital*. Smooth capital is aligned with World war machine, and plays the fundamental role in realizing the global smooth space:

*It is as though, at the outcome of the striation that capitalism was able to carry out to an unequal point of perfection, circulating capital necessarily recreated, reconstituted, a sort of smooth space in which the destiny of human beings is recast... [A]t the... dominant level of integrated (or rather integrating) world capitalism, a new smooth space is produced in which capital reaches its "absolute" speed, based on machinic components rather than the human component of labor. (ATP, 492)*

This passage in particular highlights one of the fundamental distinctions between the fascist total war and the terrifying peace that supercedes it. Fascism, as is argued in ATP, is based on a State that locks-into a speed-driven suicidal vortex, a collision course with violent abolition. In the postfascist world, however, the absolute speed by the State is trampled by capital achieving absolute speed. It cannot be, either, that capital is here entering into a fascistic mode, as fascism is an intrinsically political phenomenon. Insofar that the political is, as Schmitt defined it, based on the antithesis of the friend and the enemy (Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 26), its operations are totally distinct from those of capital, which circulates underneath these distinctions and their affairs, slipping between the two and driving them in strange, unpredictable directions.

Such a distinction can be marshaled to elucidate a few points concerning the relationship between unconditional acceleration (U/ACC) and the political. From these grounds, "accelerating the process" – or retarding the process – cannot be carried out from the vantage point of the State, because the State has been wholly subsumed by the process itself. This does not mean, however, that the political has been completely hollowed out. As long as the friend/enemy distinction and the management of activities surrounding it persists, the political hangs on – but from the U/ACC perspective, as well as the perspective taken by D&G as outlined above, these activities can only be contextualized and carried out from their irreversibly subordinated position. Deeper into the throes of the process – the deepening of world capitalist integration – and political activity becomes a question of how

to relate to this process. Measured against this, the politico-physical suicide of fascism becomes even more apparent, as well as the necessity of cunning. A political body that learns how to properly interface with the process, to “experience [it], produce flows and conjunctions here and there” (ATP 161) is going to have a far better time than fascistic abandon or short-sighted autarky.

Any cunning political activity that produces temporal metastability within the whirlwind of integrating capitalism is, of course, a reflection of the war machine that will be setting the parameters of that metastable state. We return to the speculation at the outset: isomorphy between the development of an ethics proper to destratification and the historical supersedure of total war by the peace of the smooth space. Capital, as D&G write, might develop itself towards total war, but the means to it are cut short in a double sense. First, by the surpassing of the State itself by the war machine, and second, by the arrival of deterrence as the ghost of total war that holds its actualization at bay. Total war is thus suspended right at the borderland against it even as conflict is shuffled off into other, less obvious modes and into the peripheries. A rapid “demented or suicidal collapse” is avoided, and, out here at the edge, the process is able to prolong itself and reach ever-higher heights. For D&G this is precisely caution and wisdom – the cunning entry into negentropic individuation.

This is not, of course, an end-of-history moment. For D&G, the elements that have made possible the global smooth space – first and foremost, *smooth capital* – “continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines”. These are insurgent war machines, a factor that, especially when coupled with the (un)ground prior of smooth capital, makes it all-too-apparent that such counterattacks will be tangled up in the same subordinated dynamisms and framing of political decisions that their targets will have already been enmeshed within. It does mean, however, that transformation in geopolitical orders, the unleashing of the repressed, and the escape of the caged can be factored in at this late stage. This is, as Vince Garton described in *Leviathan Rots*, the “recursive dissolution that leaves not a network of states, but an endless flux in which the state itself disintegrates into the very war that sustains it.”

Also relevant, especially to Garton's dangling provocation, is the following on the coming era of unrestricted warfare:

*Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui argued that war was no longer about “using armed forces to compel the enemy to submit to one’s will” in the classic Clausewitzian sense. Rather, they asserted that war had evolved to “using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests.” The barrier between soldiers and civilians would fundamentally be erased, because the battle would be everywhere. The number of new battlefields would be “virtually infinite,” and could include environmental warfare, financial warfare, trade warfare, cultural warfare, and legal warfare, to name just a few. They wrote of assassinating financial speculators to safeguard a nation’s financial security, setting up slush funds to influence opponents’ legislatures and governments, and buying controlling shares of stocks to convert an adversary’s major television and newspapers outlets into tools of media warfare. According to the editor’s note, Qiao argued in a subsequent interview that “the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden.” That vision clearly transcends any traditional notions of war.”*

(h/t to Thomas Murphy for insightful convos that helped inform this post)

taken from here

[<](#) [PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT](#) [→](#)

---

## META

CONTACT  
FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX  
IMPRESSUM  
DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

## TAXONOMY

CATEGORIES  
TAGS  
AUTHORS  
ALL INPUT

## SOCIAL

FACEBOOK  
INSTAGRAM  
TWITTER